



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

DIRK KEMPTHORNE – Governor
KARL B. KURTZ – Director

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
450 West State Street, 10th Floor
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0036
PHONE 208-334-5625
FAX 208-334-0668

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Ross Mason
(208) 334-0693

TIPS TO STAY HEALTHY OVER THE HOLIDAYS; SEVERAL STATES REPORT INCREASE IN FLU ACTIVITY

Several states are reporting an increase in flu-like illnesses, but people can take precautions to protect their health. Influenza reports increased in the western states of Utah and California, with Idaho seeing a slight increase during the last week, as well. With holiday travel and families and friends uniting to celebrate, people are urged to take a few simple precautions so the flu does not wreck their holidays.

“We encourage people to enjoy the holidays, but take a few safety measures so they do not become sick,” says Dr. Christine Hahn, state epidemiologist for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. She advises people to:

- Avoid people who may be sneezing or coughing.
- Consider getting the influenza vaccine, especially if you are 65 year of age or older, or in frail health
- After visiting public places, avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth until you have washed your hands;
- Wash your hands often. Wash for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, especially before eating or after being out in public;
- If you are sick, protect your family and friends. Stay home and be extra careful around babies, people who are elderly, or others who may have health problems, as they may be more susceptible to the flu;
- Refrain from visiting a nursing home if you have a cough or respiratory illness;
- Cover your mouth if you are sniffing, sneezing or coughing;

(more)

- Do not share eating utensils, drinking glasses, towels or other personal items; and
- Get plenty of rest, exercise and eat healthy foods.

Influenza, or the flu as it is commonly called, is a contagious disease that infects the nose, throat and lungs. It is different from a cold, and can occur suddenly. Symptoms include fever, headache, body aches, fatigue, dry cough, sore throat and nasal congestion. The flu can have serious health consequences for babies under the age of two, pregnant women, people with health problems and anyone over age 65.

Hahn says the best defense against influenza is a flu shot, and there is still some vaccine available. “It is not too late to get a flu shot from your healthcare provider,” she says. “Even though last year was a mild flu season, we cannot predict what this year will bring.”

For more information about the flu, please visit <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/>.

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(Editors: For more information please contact Ross Mason, Public Information Officer, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare, 334-0693.)